

I asked our Budget Committee chairman, JUDD GREGG, to put together feasible and achievable savings recommendations. I also asked him to coordinate his work with the House and the White House.

We have also endorsed the concept of creating an independent inspector general to make sure the Katrina and Rita disaster relief will be well spent.

To further control costs, we have asked the President to send the Congress a rescissions package under the Budget Act. This is the only guaranteed way to ensure both the House and Senate jointly take a stand on spending. This authority, last used in 1992, resulted in savings, then, of nearly \$8 billion.

We are moving forward, and I urge all of our colleagues to continue to work together to impose aggressive fiscal discipline to restrain Government spending.

In the next 5 weeks, we will also consider the President's nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court of the United States. I expect the Senate to carry out its constitutional advice and consent responsibility in an expeditious, fair, and civil manner, as we did with Chief Justice John Roberts.

Harriet Miers is an accomplished and experienced lawyer, who is respected by her peers and trusted by the President. In the weeks ahead, we will have the opportunity to learn more about her background and more about her qualifications. Through courtesy calls and hearings, we will have that opportunity to hear from Ms. Miers herself.

I urge all of my colleagues to let her be heard and to resist a rush to judgment. Such as with all judicial nominees, Harriet Miers deserves a fair up-or-down vote.

In the meantime, we will continue to work for consent on pensions and Defense authorization. I urge my colleagues to work together to get these critical pieces of legislation done.

Protecting our fellow citizens' safety and well-being is our highest obligation. The American people expect and deserve a Senate that is purpose driven and that does get results. We are called upon to govern with meaningful solutions.

In this session, we have worked hard to address some daunting challenges: defeating our terrorist enemies, tackling rising energy costs, and securing our borders from illegal immigration and terrorist threat. More remains to be done. We face a serious threat of avian flu, as well as taking a hard look at our spending priorities.

These are just two examples. There will be many more. But I am confident that by pulling together with a sense of common purpose we can secure a stronger, safer, healthier, freer, and more prosperous America. I am confident that with determination and focus we will continue to move America forward.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

PRIORITIES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, similar to all Senators, with rare exception, I spent last week's recess at home. I traveled Nevada meeting with my constituents. I met with a wide range of people. I had many conversations. But all the conversations came back to the same issues, including rising energy prices.

One of the last conversations I had was at my home in Searchlight, where some of our friends who live in Searchlight came to visit with us, Judy and Dick Hill. He works at a powerplant, the Mojave Generating Facility, about 35 miles from Las Vegas. She is the assistant postmistress of Searchlight. They have two boys. One of them is going to school. She is even taking some courses at a community college.

They spend about \$500 a month on gasoline. Maybe they should get vehicles that do not use as much gas, and I am sure they are considering that, but it would not matter what kind of vehicle they drove; they need lots of gasoline to be able to do what they have to do, such as going back and forth to work, taking the boy to school.

People in Nevada are concerned about Iraq, as well they should be. I certainly applaud the people of Iraq. A little more than half of them turned out to vote. That is courageous. They are proud people, and I am glad they have shown their strength by turning out to vote. And it appears the constitution is going to pass. We will know in a few days.

We lost five soldiers yesterday in Iraq. We are very quickly approaching 2,000. We have not quite arrived at that number yet, but we are 10 or 12 short of that number.

The costs are ongoing. The war seems to be intractable. Surprisingly, the administration is still claiming, as Secretary Rice did over the weekend on a Sunday talk show, that the war is a result of 9/11. The American people do not accept that because it is simply not true.

Of course, constituents were concerned about Katrina and, of course, whether we are ready for another disaster such as the avian flu. I am sure this is not unique. I am sure other Senators had the same experiences I did these past 10 days. Americans from all walks of life are focused on these important issues, and they are looking to us for help. As the Democratic leader, I felt comfortable assuring my constituents that my Democratic colleagues are doing everything we can to meet these three areas about which they spoke.

On Iraq, we continue to press the President to answer key questions

about how he is going to change course and achieve military and political success and to get an accounting of how the money has been spent.

On energy, we believe we must remain committed—and we will remain committed—to energy independence by the year 2020. And we have pushed to help families fill their tanks and heat their homes.

With Katrina, we have continued to fight to make sure the needs of displaced families are placed at the top of the Senate's agenda.

And with the avian flu, we have taken the lead in offering solutions to help prepare America and Americans for the next possible disaster.

You see, Democrats understand these issues are the priorities of the American people. That is why they are priorities for us.

Mr. President, a couple of comments regarding the statement of my friend, the Republican leader. I do not know of anyone who is calling for higher taxes, as he suggests. But I know there are people calling for doing away with the budget resolution and reconciliation that calls for \$70 billion more in tax cuts—\$70 billion more in tax cuts—that go to the elite of the country.

On top of that, I would suggest that we need to, in effect, get rid of the reconciliation.

The resolution that will be executed by the reconciliation process now before the Congress, that was called by all leaders of Protestant Churches the night we voted on it immoral, is even more so now, the resolution before us, not counting what the House says they are going to do. They are going to cut more, Medicaid by \$10 billion, cut Medicaid more, cut medical care to the poorest of the poor in America. They want to increase it by another \$5 or \$10 billion. That is unconscionable.

My distinguished friend, the majority leader, said the high energy costs are a result of the storm of Katrina. That is simply without fact. Prior to Katrina, oil prices were at \$70 a barrel. This is a problem that has been going on for a while. We Democrats are concerned about the priorities of the American people. I suggest that those issues about which my friend spoke are not priorities, certainly not to the people of Nevada. We are focused on addressing America's pressing needs. Republicans are acting as though nothing is wrong, that the storm caused the problems.

Take energy. The price of gas continues to hover around \$3. I already told you about Dick and Judy Hill in Searchlight. Millions of other people are in the same boat as Dick and Judy. The administration's own Energy Department predicts families will pay hundreds more to heat their homes this winter.

I met with Governor Doyle of Wisconsin today. He said in Wisconsin to heat your home will cost \$300 a month more. Despite these facts, Republicans have refused to help families at the

pump. They have blocked our efforts to help working families heat their homes. Senate Republicans have taken a similar hands-off approach to Iraq and Katrina. We still have done nothing to help the victims of Katrina. We have appropriated money. The majority leader says we should have somebody to make sure the money is spent right. We have begged for legislation to create a czar so this money can be spent wisely. No, no legislation in that regard. They won't allow us to bring it to the floor. The huddled masses we all saw on TV—I read the spokesperson for this administration, Bob Novak, in the Washington Post today, the columnist. He said it looks good in Louisiana, especially New Orleans: We just won't let the people come back. We will have the city about half of what it was before, and that will be great for Louisiana.

That is their response to this catastrophe. The people who needed the help the most have still gotten no help. And preparedness for avian flu, let's see what happens on that.

The best example, though, of the Republicans, the best example is the Defense authorization bill. We haven't done one. At a time of war, we have not done a Defense authorization bill. In that bill we have money for troops, for pay raises so that they will pay taxes, money for health care, for new equipment. Republicans refuse to bring it to the floor. We even agreed to 12 amendments, 12 amendments. The average number of amendments is about 150. We agreed to 12. The only real vote we have had on the Defense authorization bill was an amendment offered by the majority leader on Boy Scouts. Yet we don't have time for the Defense authorization bill. Why won't they let us go forward with the 12 amendments? Because one of the amendments calls for an independent, bipartisan commission to study what went wrong with Katrina. They will not let us do that. They are willing to bring down the whole Defense authorization bill because they know on that vehicle we have a right to offer an amendment. On the things they are bringing up now, the appropriations bills, we can't do it procedurally in the Senate. They do not want an independent, bipartisan commission to take a look at what went wrong with this administration's response to Katrina. You would think the administration would want this. But, no, they are fighting this, just as this President fought the 9/11 Commission.

I would hope that we would get someone like Senator McCain, who was the one who forced the issue on 9/11, to come forward. Let's have this as a bipartisan call for help, for review. From Defense authorization to Katrina relief, the Republican record is clear: Their plans for the future are bad. Instead of helping Americans, Republicans have decided to use the months ahead to make problems worse. For the next 5 weeks, Republicans have decided we should focus on cutting health care

funding for the sick and elderly, cutting education for students, cutting housing and food assistance, food stamps. That is part of the budget reconciliation. They want to cut food stamps. Republicans will be arguing that all this is justified in the name of fiscal discipline.

Now we have about 20 people who are running the House. With Congressman DELAY's problems, the Speaker has lost control of the House. We read in papers all over America today that the House is being run by 20 renegades who are telling him what to do. It appears he is listening, and he is going to do what they want. What are some of the things they want to do? Cut Medicaid even more, more tax cuts, forget about the people in Louisiana and Mississippi. The group that now runs the House of Representatives is arguing that all this is justified in the name of fiscal discipline, and these are the same people who have brought us the largest deficits and debt increases in this Nation's history. Remember when President Bush took office, some say there was a surplus over 10 years of \$7 trillion. That has all since gone. Now we are \$7 trillion in the hole. Some turnaround. These are the same people who voted for trillions in additional tax cuts and hundreds of billions for Iraq without batting an eye about the fact that none of this spending was offset.

The same people would like to move forward on another round of expensive tax breaks for the elite. America can do better than this. It is time for Congress to focus on the needs of the United States. The American people have concerns about a number of issues, and we have an obligation to address them. I know the majority leader would like to proceed with business as usual, but that is not what the American people expect or want. They aren't interested in more tax breaks for the rich or perks for big oil. They want us to come together and focus on real problems. We have 5 weeks before the next recess—that is Thanksgiving—and a host of issues to address, including energy prices, Katrina, preparedness for avian flu, and other disasters.

It is the pledge of the Democrats that we will not allow these issues to be swept under the rug. Democrats will do everything in our power to make sure these issues are addressed before we leave. On energy, we will fight to make sure the Senate takes real steps to help millions of families fill their tanks and heat their homes, like LIHEAP, like price gouging. On avian flu, we will continue to push the Senate to consider our comprehensive legislation so that our country has the tools and resources it needs to focus and confront this threat. With Katrina, we will make sure hundreds of thousands of victims are helped, not forgotten. Displaced families may no longer be front-page news, but that doesn't mean their needs are met. Thousands are still without health care and housing, and

we have an obligation to help. Energy costs, preparedness, Katrina relief—top priorities for the American people, and Democrats will fight to make sure they are the top priorities for the Senate as well. America must do better than what we have done.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CORNYN). The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. My understanding is the Senate is now in morning business?

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the Senator will allow, under the previous order, we are scheduled to go into a period for the transaction of morning business until 3 p.m. The time will be equally divided until 3 p.m.

Mr. DURBIN. Could the Chair advise me how much time I would have under that understanding? Is it half of 35 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

CONCERNS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the Democratic leader for coming to the floor. We have all returned from our time back home. The Columbus Day recess gave us a chance to go back to our home States. I have run into Senators in the hallway. Senator CORNYN said: I was blazing across Texas. I know Senator REID was in Nevada. I was going across the State of Illinois. It is a good time. It is a good chance to see if some of the things we are talking about in Washington are really resonating and important to the families back home.

I sense, after having been around here for a while, where we spend a lot of time, the people back home scratch their heads and think: They are wasting time. It is all political talk and speeches. When are they going to talk about the things that really count?

I will tell you what I found really counts back home. I went to Wheaton, IL, and visited with Joel Gomez. Joel Gomez, a year and a half ago, was injured in Iraq as an American soldier and became a quadriplegic. Joel Gomez is a wonderful young man. This was the first time I had met him face to face. He lights up a room with his smile, and he is so engaging. He is in a hospital bed and cannot move. The people in the community and the veterans organizations have come together and built him a new home. They built it in 3 months. They broke all construction records. It is for his mother and father and himself. It cost over \$700,000. They put all of that into it to make sure that Joel Gomez can have a good life from this point forward.

I talked to his mom and dad and the people who are around him. I said: How is care at the veterans hospital for Joel? They are trying their best. Sometimes his condition is so challenging, they have to go to other places. But